

CHOOSE THIS DAY!

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Fort Monmouth, New Jersey**

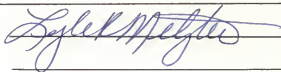
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**by
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The ringing phone cries incessantly to be answered. In your dream filled, peaceful, refreshing sleep, you haltingly become conscious of its unyielding demand. As you reach past your digital clock for the phone, you notice that it is 0313.

Your mind quickly races through the counseling situations in which people in crisis come to your for help -- the marriage in trouble; the family with the runaway teenager; the couple whose son has just told them that he is a practicing homosexual; the person who is seeking God and has asked your help in the search. Although years of ministry have prepared you for any of these crises, you are not quite prepared for the crisis on the phone.

"Chaplain, this is Sergeant, Jones, form the headquarters. Our unit is on alert for training and deployment. You are ordered to report to the armory with all your gear, prepared to move to out training site, within six hours. This is not an alert! I repeat, this is not an alert! Any questions, sir?" he asks.

"No, Sergeant," you weakly respond. That is not true, of course. You have many questions. What will happen to your family, your finances, your congregation, your unfinished projects, your unfinished counseling sessions? These and a host of other questions begin to flood your mind as you deal with the reality of this untimely interruption.

Your wife rolls over with a sigh. Sleepily she asks, "Who was it , Honey? Is Kathy Jones going to the hospital to have their first baby?"

"No! I have been ordered to active duty for training and deployment!" Like a shot, she sits up in bed, ramrod stiff. "That's not fair! Our church people are gaining increased respect for you. Those first few months here were so discouraging to the both of us. The frustration of dealing with those well-intentioned dragons left over from the previous pastor's cronies. It

required a great deal of courage for those members to rally behind you and tell those people that this church was not going to go through this mess again. Even though some of the largest contributors left the church, God quickly replaced them with other faithful members. Some of the people who had not been active in years decided to come back, after they heard about the changes that God had made. Now we have the plans to improved the facilities. What about them? What about the children? What about the car? Who is going to take care of the maintenance on it? What about the insurance, and, and . . .?"

You lovingly interrupt her. You don't have all the answers either, but you don't need to deal with all these things now. Your own grief floods over you.

"I understand what you're saying! When I signed up for the reserve program, I thought it would be a great way to expand my ministry with some of the men of the community who do not go to church anywhere. I figured a few meetings, maybe a summer 'camping trip,' and all the good times with all the other chaplains within the unit would be a good deal for me. While I knew that this phone call was always a possibility, I thought it was so remote that it would never happen until I had safely retired! Is it so wrong for a man, even if he's a minister of God, to want some of the extra things for his family that the reserve pay could provide?"

"No its not! I know the unit thinks they can not go off to war without you. I know you are needed there. But we need you, too! Just call them back and tell them you are not coming! I know, tell them that you're going to remain behind and help minister to the waiting wives. After all, they need help and ministry, too! That's it. Now make that call so we can get started with the wives of the men in the unit. Even though that's decided,

I'm too upset to go back to sleep. I'll go downstairs and make some coffee while you call the unit. O.K.?" she pleadingly asks.

"No, its not O.K.," you reluctantly tell her. The coffee is a great idea, but I need to get my stuff packed and into the car so I can get to the unit. I'm not certain how many vehicles are available for us, so I will take the car. I cannot afford to have my ministry slowed down due to the lack of transportation. If we leave suddenly, I'll leave the keys in the ashtray. You can use your spare set to pick it up! I know the church family will be willing to shuttle you and the kids around for the next few days. They will need something to do to help them work through their own grief. Besides, even though Sergeant Jones said it was not an alert drill, it probably is. I'll probably be back before the kids are home from school. Now let's go get that coffee!" you say encouragingly.

"O.K.," she says hopefully, but doubtfully, too. As you walk past the kid's bedroom, you look in and wonder. Without speaking a word to each other, you both know that each wonders if you will indeed be home tonight.

So this is how great world-wide conflicts begin! Your mind quickly flashes through the scenes of countless movies about the start of World War II. The confusion, tears, sobs, stacks of equipment, rumors, and an unbelievable lack of hard information makes chaos seem like tranquility. "For all the planning, training, and preparation, this certainly does not look like we know what we're doing," you mutter to yourself.

The members of the unit are beginning to report in greater numbers. All are familiar to you, despite their diverse spiritual, physical, social and economic background. Their dishevelled appearance, emphasized by their

lack of complete uniform, clean shave, and well packed equipment seems to tell you that they were not really ready for this day, either.

You see those members to whom you have ministered. You notice a young man from a different denomination that you helped through the death of a parent. There is a young woman whose first child was still-born. the resulting complications left her barren. Without a miracle, the young woman's dreams of a large family will go unfulfilled. Here comes the officer whose sharp appearance is in stark contrast to the way he looked several months ago. Your counsel helped both him and his wife to work together to sweeten a sour marriage. The litany and remembrance continues.

Despite the tremendous diversity, there are two great common threads through collage of humanity: the first is that there are tears evident from the separation; the second, these are your people. Certainly, you do not command them. But you fulfill a higher commission than command, you love this great, diverse, body of men and women as if they were your own congregation. Now more than ever, you recognize their great need for a shepherd. Silently, you thank God for his call to you to be one of His shepherds. Quietly, but not as unnoticed as you think, you weep as you reflect upon the flock you so quickly left behind. Your tears of grief mirror those in the eyes and upon the faces of the members of your unit.

Nostalgia and grief are placed on the back-burner as you report to your commander. The briefing by the commander of the unit's mission is crisp, brief, military, and woefully incomplete.

"Chaplain, we've been ordered to execute our mobilization plan. This means that we are to pull out of here within 48 hours to go to our mobilization station. My phone is driving me crazy with numerous personal and personnel problems. Get with the S-1. You two start sorting out and

solving some of these problems. I want to help each member of this command and his or her family, but I can not do it by myself. I will help them by using my staff and the chain of command. To minimize rumors, I will announce significant information as it becomes available. I will be holding regular briefings as often as possible to disseminate information. Now, get on with helping me solve some of these personal problems!"

"Yes, Sir!" you reply firmly. You know its a large task which will require you to draw upon every source of strength you have: spiritual, physical, military, administrative, and especially your call from God.

You head to your cubby-hole to get with the other member of the chaplain ministry team. He's there with not only his equipment prepared, but himself also. His face reflects a great peace, calm and tranquility. What a refreshing sight! He looks like he's been in the presence of God! His face is the picture of confidence in a relationship with a God who loves and cares for His children, no matter what the circumstances might be. He is as eager as always, with a servant's heart, to help you be the most successful chaplain in the service. You realize that you will need all the help that you can find in an attempt to accomplish this very great task.

"Chaplain, it sure is good to see you. I had certainly hoped that this day would never get here. Is there any chance that this is really just a drill, and not a deployment?"

"No, Bill, I just got a briefing from the 'Old Man.' This is the real thing. You and I have talked a great deal about this day. Now the time for talk is over and the time for action is here. Let's get going to help these dear people of ours make this difficult transition from reservist to combat soldiers."

"Yes, sir. One other thing, though, chaplain. Is every thing well with your family? How is your wife doing? How did the congregation react to this news? Is there anything I can help you with before we leave?"

These questions bring to mind that you are human, too. When you were ordained, you did not loose all the feelings and thoughts about creature comforts and temporal responsibilities. In short, you know that you need a chaplain, also. What a comfort it is to have as your assistant a man who cares about you and others with a pastor's heart. Between phone calls and visits, you and your assistant discuss your families and the situation in which you left them. But time is short, the work is great, and the working helps relieve you of the stress of leaving your loved ones.

Decisions are made in quick order. There is no luxury for lengthy deliberation. As much as possible things are in order awaiting additional information. Having contacted your chaplain supervisor, the other staff officers, the subordinate unit commanders and senior non-commissioned officers, it is now time to go outside and minister with your presence.

As you walk around the unit area, you notice different work details helping load the equipment in preparation for movement. The work is long, hard, and hot. The work drains the people who are already emotionally drained. A group of men looks up and sees you standing there. Your friendly smile and familiar face brightens their faces. It gets quiet in the group. After some pleasantries, one of the soldiers looks intently at you.

"Chaplain, may I talk with you?"

"Certainly, Specialist Smith. How can I help?"

"Sir, can we go over here?" a nervous voice asks quietly, looking over his shoulder at his friends discussing the latest rumor. "Chaplain, I'm afraid! I never joined to go to war. I only joined to be with my buddies, for

a few extra bucks, and to have some fun! I did not sign up for the stuff going on today!"

As if someone had placed you into a time machine, you now imagine yourself in a combat environment. Although not certain of the enemy at this time, your mind travels to the hot spots in the world. They all have one thing in common, communist insurrection. The type of enemy most likely to be faced will be one with the same ideology and determination as the forces faced in Korea and Vietnam. Being more familiar with Korea, you imagine what it must have been like in that conflict.

Men of God who had joined the military to serve their fellow countrymen in that time of conflict have names familiar to you. Men like you who had left family, friends, and fellowships soon adopted family, friends and fellowships in the mud, dust, heat, and cold that was Korea. Though chaplains are non-combatants, the dust of Korea soon swallowed the blood of that first chaplain who was killed in action.

You, too, face the fear of all men in combat--death. Death quickly visited Corps of Chaplains in Korea when Chaplain Herman G. Felhoelter, Roman Catholic, was praying over a group of severely wounded men. The chaplain had agreed to stay with the men so that the rest of the less seriously wounded could escape from the rapidly advancing enemy. An American sergeant looked through binoculars in horrified disbelief when he saw the advancing North Koreans murder a chaplain in prayer. The day before his 37th birthday, and just eleven days after the first Americans entered war, death claimed the first life of a chaplain in Korea.¹

¹Rodger R. Venzke, *Confidence in Battle, Inspiration in Peace*, 5 vols., (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1975), 5:69.

On July 25th, the forces in Korea lost their second chaplain to the grim reaper. A Nazarene Chaplain Byron D. Lee, a man with prior enlisted service and combat service in Europe during World War II, was killed. Lee's unit was being pulled back in a convoy from an assault on Hamch'ang. An enemy plane spotted and strafed the convoy, killing Lee.² Within less than a month, two chaplains were in eternity with their God.

Your mind quickly shifts from the reality of history to the reality of your present situation. "Smith, I understand your fear of death. I also understand how you might feel that you got much more here than you enlisted for when you joined this unit. However, even with the great potential for danger and death, I would like you to remember several things. The first is that you did agree to join this unit. The second is that these people are your friends and neighbors. As long as each member of the team does his part, the team will do well. Thirdly, I remember your decision to trust Christ for your eternal life. Paul said, 'For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.'³ Though we are about to embark into the great unknown, we are going together with Him."

"Yeah, Chaplain, I remember. I'm sorry that I bothered you with this problem. It doesn't seem to be such a big one now. Thanks for your help!"

After prayer, you begin to move through the unit area again. On your way, you think how grateful you are to Specialist Smith and your Lord. As you shared with him, you reminded yourself of those same three things. In encouraging Smith, you helped yourself. You remembered afresh who you are and why you are in a unit that is about to be deployed into combat.

²Ibid., p. 70.

³Phil. 1:21.

Back in your cubby-hole, you find your assistant busy as ever. Like a true servant, he has been busy helping you by gathering messages from those who need your help, by helping those he could to relieve you from as much burden as possible, and by keeping the coffee fresh and hot. A quick, silent prayer of thanks ascends to heaven. He truly is a member of the chaplain ministry team. What a blessing it is to have such a man as part of your ministry.

During one of the lulls in the demands for your time, your attention, and yourself, your assistant brings you a cup of fresh coffee. "Got a minute, chaplain?"

"Certainly, Bill. Have a seat. Thanks for the coffee."

"Sir, I was thinking that in the midst of this chaos, Christ has made it possible for us to have a peace that passes all understanding. He also gives us wonderful opportunities to share the love of God with others. Remember the concept of 'targets of opportunities' that Chaplain Kirk told about in Grenada?"

Your mind races quickly back to the video tape of the J.J. Murphy lectures at the Chaplain School by Chaplain (LTC) Ross Kirk, U.S. Forces Grenada Command Chaplain.⁴ He shared that the schedules of specific services on a regular basis were difficult to maintain in Grenada. However, the chaplains were always alert for a group of men with a few minutes to spare. These groups were "targets of opportunity" for the ministry of the chaplain. This seemed to be the most effective way for the chaplains, especially of the maneuver battalions, to minister to their men who were in a very stressful situation.

⁴Ross Kirk, *J.J. Murphy Lectures*, a video cassette, Ft. Monmouth, NJ, Chaplain Center and School, viewed 1985.

Secondly, you remember his observation that combat is a great opportunity to minister. There are many young men who are made aware of the need to have eternal questions answered because they are more aware of the great potential to enter into that eternity. Not only did the combat soldiers want and need ministry, but the friends and families back home eager to hear from God's man in the chaplaincy, also. The chapel quickly became a place within the community where family and friends could gather to pray, to wait, and to seek communications from their loved ones in the conflict. Getting messages and mail to and from Grenada became the "cup of cool water"⁵ ministry at the time.

Thirdly, Chaplain Kirk told how the services in the chapels in the States rolled over. That is, there was so much interest in getting right with God, that different faith groups wanted to use the chapels. As quickly as one group emptied the chapel, another group was quick to fill it and begin another worship service.

"Bill, this looks like our 'Grenada,' " you say as you complete your reflection and your coffee. "Like vinegar and oil in a salad dressing never mix completely with the other, but remain separate, always needing to be shaken before use, we have our own 'dressing' right here. We have great despair and opportunity. Let's go out and 'shake it up' a bit, and look for 'targets of opportunity.' "

The hours fly by as you and your assistant are constantly on the move. There are more phone calls to answer, letters to write for those who are needing help explaining to loved one and bill collectors what is happening, equipment to pack, and last minute items to conclude for family and church. There is a constant need for rest when the body seems to be

⁵Matt. 10:42

able to go no further. The demands of this ministry are incredibly taxing and exhilarating. The months of establishing rapport with the members of the unit pay off handsomely during this time. As the pastor of this fine flock, you have the privilege, opportunity, and responsibility to hear the deepest fears and greatest joys in the lives of your new flock. Not only is the fear of death a constant theme, but also the fear of capture. The usual thoughts of a soldier within the unit is that capture is not something that a chaplain need to worry about because of the status accorded a captured chaplain by the Geneva Convention. However, the thoughts of capture, torture and eventual death in captivity never seem to leave the minds of the troops. It seems like this worries them more than the thoughts of death itself. Some have even told you in confidence that they are planning on missing the movement to the training station so that they will not have to be deployed. You, too, begin to wonder about your own decision.

Capture, torture, and death are no strangers to the Corps of Chaplains. The names of Kapaun, Hyslop, Connor, and Brunnert fill your memory all too often. These were the chaplains who were captured, but did not survive their captivity, in spite of the special status under the Geneva Convention.

Chaplain Emil J. Kapaun was with the 3rd Battalion, 8th Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division when the Chinese Communist Forces intervened in the war. He was captured with about 50 wounded men after a fierce attack by the Communist Chinese. For six months following his capture, Chaplain Kapaun fought against the communist indoctrination in very deprived conditions. He did all that he could do in his power to give hope and comfort to the sick and wounded. His presence and ministry caused many to continue the struggle to live when there was little reason to continue. On May 23, 1951, suffering from a blood clot, pneumonia, and dysentery, he died a martyr's death. He

was awarded the Legion of Merit, posthumously, for "courageous actions" from a man who considered not task too menial for him to perform.⁶

Two days after the capture of Chaplain Kapaun, Chaplain Kenneth C. Hyslop, Northern Baptist, was also captured. A veteran of six years in the army, Chaplain Hyslop had previously been awarded a Bronze Star when he led a group of soldiers who had been cut-off back to friendly lines. Captured on November 4, 1951, Chaplain Hyslop died on December 12, 1951. The date varied in the reports of various returning American prisoners of war, but the cause was the same. Chaplain Hyslop died primarily as a result of injuries and starvation.⁷

In late November 1950, Chaplain James W. Conner, Episcopalian, was lost in the fierce fighting around the Changjin Reservoir. He was officially listed as missing on December 1, 1950. He was never found and was eventually listed as "Presumed Dead."⁸

The last chaplain taken prisoner was Chaplain Lawrence F. Brunnert, Roman Catholic. He was with the 32nd Regiment in the vicinity of the Changjin Reservoir. During the short time of his captivity, he had a brief time of devoted service to his fellow prisoners. Returning prisoners indicated that he died of wounds on December 20, 1950.⁹

The recollections of these dear men of God who died while they ministered in captivity serve as a constant reminder of your own likely end, despite your special status under the Geneva Convention, if you are captured. One of the grimmest statistics to come out of the Korean Conflict concerning the Corps of Chaplains is that not one captured chaplain returned

⁶Venzke, *Confidence*, 5:82,83.

⁷Ibid., p. 83.

⁸Ibid., p. 85.

⁹Ibid., pp. 85-86.

alive. Although this statistic causes you some concern there is much more important things for you to remember: the opportunities to minister while in a combat environment.

Not every chaplain in Korea was killed. Neither was everyone captured so quickly that he had no impact upon the soldiers, the country, or the work of God. Although many of the men made impacts which were probably not properly recorded, you remember that there were two particular instances in which the cause of Christ was well served by these combat shepherds as they ministered to their flocks. These two ministries serve to warm your heart, like a sweet letter from your dear wife.

The first of these ministries was by a civilian auxiliary chaplain. Harold Voelke, Presbyterian, was especially fruitful among the North Koreans. Voelkel had been serving as a missionary in Korea before the communist invasion. Soon after his evacuation to Japan, he met Chaplain Ivan L. Bennett, Far East Command Chaplain. Chaplain Bennett invited Voelkel to use his language and ministry skills as an auxiliary chaplain.

Soon after Seoul was liberated, Chaplain Voelkel learned of a camp of enemy prisoners of war nearby. He decided to visit them, looking first of all for any christians among them. In three different camps, Inch'on, P'yongyang and Koje-do, he came in contact with more than 150,000 North Koreans. After finding the christians who were interested in Bible study, he began to conduct evangelistic services. Many considered Voelkel's ministry as the primary motivation for some 60,000 North Koreans to remain in South Korea after the war. Of this number, about 160 became vocational christian workers, pastors, Bible teachers, seminary professors, and military chaplains.¹⁰

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 78-79.

What a great opportunity combat chaplains have!

The second incident occurred in the ambush in Kuner-ri pass. More than 4,000 casualties occurred in the tragic engagement. But some good came out of it, too, as Chaplain James C. Carroll, Roman Catholic, learned years later while serving at Fort Hood, Texas. On the day of the ambush Carroll was serving as the chaplain of the 38th Regiment of the 2nd Infantry Division. In the midst of the death, dying and chaos, a sergeant noticed the unusual peace and tranquility in the actions of Chaplain Carroll. He remembered that Carroll kept telling everyone that the Lord would get them out of that tragedy. The tranquility in the life of a single army chaplain started that sergeant on a quest for the source of that peace. Twenty-three years later, Carroll received a letter from the now retired sergeant who recounted his own conversion and subsequent ministry as a deacon and a Sunday School superintendent.¹¹

What a great opportunity combat chaplains have!

Having always wondered how you would respond if mobilized, you now realize that this is the greatest time for your military ministry. Though others count the cost too high to go with the unit, and you spend much time in counseling them, you realize that this is the place for you at this time. You count the opportunities too great to miss due to fear of death, capture, or being wounded severely. You realize that there has been a struggle going on within your own heart about whether you would obey your military orders or not. You choose to obey. Having the issue finally resolved in your mind, and affirming again that you will deploy with your unit, a great sense of peace floods your soul. So this is that peace Jesus told about in the Gospel of

¹¹Ibid. pp. 84, 85.

John.¹² Although still working at a frenzied pace, you now begin to be strengthened in the ministry. Having committed yourself to the team, you find peace, even when it looks like it's going to be a difficult "season" ahead.

Having ministered in so many different, draining ways to the great mass of people who want and need your help, you finally drift off to a trouble sleep. Can it be possible that all of this has gone on in less than 48 hours, you ponder in disbelief. Your relatively quiet corner in the headquarters where you are dozing is within hearing distance of the incessant ringing of the phones, however. It still continues to ring. No one seems to be answering it as it keeps on ringing. Still almost soundly asleep, you bark out an order to someone to answer the phone. Your own order startles you awake. With the cold sweat of anxiety beaded upon your forehead, you realize that this has only been a dream. You have not been alerted at all, but still are at home, next to your wife. Wow! What a relief, you think. Quietly you offer a prayer of thanksgiving that you are still at home, and that even in your dream, you have decided what you will do if "the call" ever comes.

Your prayer and your relief are short-lived, however, as your ears hear the ringing of the phone. Your mind quickly races through the counseling situations in which people in crisis come to you for help--the marriage in trouble; the family with the runaway teenager; the couple whose son has just told them that he is a practicing homosexual; the person who is seeking God and has asked your help in the search. Although years of ministry have prepared you for any of these crises, you are not quite prepared for the crisis on the phone.

¹²John 14:27.

"Chaplain, this is Sergeant Jones from the headquarters. Our unit is on alert for training and deployment. You are ordered to report to the armory with all your gear prepared to move to our training site within six hours. This is not an alert! I repeat, this is not an alert! Any questions, sir?", he asks.

"Honey, who was that? Is Kathy Jones going to the hospital to have their first baby?"

"No,..."

Although this is a private decision for each chaplain, it is a decision that you should make before the call comes. If in good conscience you believe you would not deploy with your unit, you owe it to yourself, your family, your unit, and your God to make that decision public. As staff officers, we are to help our commanders solve problems, not to be a part of one. The costs are high, but the opportunities for ministry are too great to miss.

"Choose this day!"

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